Struthers Early Years Centre
Day Care of Children

Castle Stuart Walk
Troon
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Telephone: 01292 690006

Type of inspection:
Unannounced

Completed on:
7 September 2026

Service provided by:
South Ayrshire Council

Service provider number:
SP2003003269

Service no:
CS2014325237

About the service

Struthers Early Years Centre is located in Troon, South Ayrshire. It is located in a purpose-built building in a site adjacent to Struthers Primary School. The service is provided by South Ayrshire Council.

The service is registered to provide a daycare of children service to a maximum of 110 children not yet attending primary school at any one time. No more than 110 are aged 2 years to those not yet attending primary school full time with no more than 20 aged 2 to under 3.

Children aged 3-5 years have access to two playrooms which can be joined through an indoor sliding partition and are joined by a secure outdoor space. Children aged 2-3 years have access to a smaller playroom with access to a section of the outdoor area. Older children can at times throughout the day freely move between indoors and outdoors. The centre is located within walking distance of local shops, parks and amenities.

About the inspection

This was an unannounced inspection which took place on 2 and 3 September 2026 between 08:15 and 17:30. This inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration and complaints information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered throughout the inspection year.

To inform our evaluation we:
- Spoke and spent time with children using the service. We also spoke with five friends and family members.
- Received seven completed questionnaires.
- Spoke with 14 staff and the management team. We also received two completed staff questionnaires.
- Observed practice and daily life.
- Reviewed documents.
- Spoke with two visiting professionals.

As part of our inspections, we assess core assurances. Core assurances are checks we make to ensure children are safe, the physical environment is well maintained and that a service is operating legally. At the time of this inspection, no improvements were identified relating to core assurances.

Key messages

• Children benefitted from warm, nurturing relationships with staff and experienced a sense of belonging, helping them feel safe, secure and valued.

• Staff created a positive play environment where children were engaged, motivated and able to make choices, with strong examples of outdoor play, construction experiences and child-led learning supporting independence and wellbeing.

• Parents spoke positively about the caring, welcoming ethos of the nursery and the supportive relationships they had developed with staff.

• Leaders had begun implementing new approaches to quality assurance, planning and assessment; however, these were not yet fully embedded or consistently demonstrating improved outcomes for children.

• Systems for personal planning, tracking children's progress and evaluating learning required further development to ensure children's individual needs and next steps were consistently identified and followed through.

• Strengthening self-evaluation, recording systems and staff confidence in leading improvement would help ensure positive outcomes are consistently achieved for all children.

From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good

Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

Leadership 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

The service had developed a shared set of values based on belonging, kindness, fun and honesty. These values were visible throughout the nursery and were reflected in day-to-day practice. Staff interacted with children in a caring and respectful way. We observed staff offering encouragement and praise, which helped children develop confidence, independence and positive self-esteem. Children enjoyed a range of play experiences and were actively engaged in their learning. Parents described the nursery as nurturing, welcoming and inclusive. They told us their children were happy, settled and confident and had developed positive relationships with staff. As a result, children experienced a sense of safety, security and belonging.

The service had started to review its vision and values with staff, children and families. However, this work was still at an early stage and had not yet been fully embedded. Continuing this work would help ensure the service's values clearly reflected the views and experiences of those who used the nursery and supported a shared understanding of what was important for children.
The management team had introduced systems to monitor and review the quality of the service, including a calendar of planned quality assurance activities. There were some signs of improvement and the manager demonstrated a commitment to developing the service. Since the previous inspection, the provider had offered additional support through development sessions and visits.

However, quality assurance processes were not yet sufficiently robust or consistent. For example, we found gaps in children's personal plans and records. Systems used to monitor children's learning and development did not always clearly show how information gathered about children's progress was being used to plan their next learning experiences. Records of discussions with parents were not consistently reviewed and analysed to identify areas for improvement. As a result, leaders could not always demonstrate the impact that changes had made to outcomes for children. The service should strengthen its approach to self-evaluation and quality assurance and ensure children and families have meaningful opportunities to contribute to service improvement.

Recruitment processes were managed through the local authority. Staff spoke positively about improvements that had been made to the environment and welcomed recent changes. However, some staff lacked confidence in using their professional judgement and contributing to service improvement. Opportunities for staff to observe one another's practice, reflect on their work and identify strengths and areas for development were not yet fully established. This limited staff's ability to influence change and consistently drive improvement.

Leaders should continue to support and empower staff to share ideas, reflect on practice and contribute to decision-making. Developing a culture of shared responsibility for improvement would help strengthen practice across the nursery and lead to better outcomes for children in their learning, development and wellbeing.

Children play and learn 3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

We evaluated this quality indicator as adequate, where strengths only just outweighed weaknesses.

Most children were engaged, motivated and enjoyed their play. We observed children participating enthusiastically in a range of experiences including storytelling, singing, creative activities, construction play, outdoor play and problem-solving activities. Staff encouraged children to recall familiar stories, share their ideas and follow their interests. For example, one child identified a challenge during play and developed their own solution, with appropriate support from staff to access the resources they needed. As a result, children developed confidence, creativity, curiosity and skills in thinking through problems independently.

Children had opportunities to lead their own play and make choices throughout the day. Free-flow access to outdoor spaces promoted independence and supported children's physical wellbeing. Staff had thoughtfully considered how to maintain children's access to outdoor play while creating a comfortable indoor environment. For example, doors were safely propped open using plastic hand-shaped door stops, allowing children to move freely between indoor and outdoor areas while helping to retain warmth within the playroom. This supported children's independence and choice about where they wished to play. Leaders should continue to monitor these arrangements as the weather becomes colder to ensure children's comfort and wellbeing are maintained.

The block play area had been thoughtfully developed, with a large, well-defined space dedicated to construction play. Recent staff training had positively influenced practice in this area and learning from the training was clearly reflected in the experiences available to children. Children used a wide range of resources, including safety hats and construction signs, to create imaginative structures and develop their ideas. We observed children working together to design and build large towers and structures, demonstrating cooperation, communication and problem-solving skills. Children were encouraged to take appropriate risks during their play and were well supported by staff to do so safely. Additional resources, including teddies, magnetic toys and a full-size tyre, extended children's play and provided opportunities to explore different textures and materials. As a result, children experienced rich, hands-on learning opportunities that supported their creativity, confidence, physical development and ability to work collaboratively with others.

Opportunities remained to extend this approach across other areas of the learning environment. The positive impact of staff training was most evident within the block play area and should now be replicated more consistently throughout the nursery. Further development of resources and experiences to support children's literacy, numeracy, mark-making, creativity and sensory exploration would help ensure all areas offered equally rich and engaging learning opportunities. This would help ensure they continued to build on their skills, knowledge and interests over time.

Staff interactions were warm, respectful and nurturing. Staff knew children and families well and used positive, rights-respecting approaches. We observed some examples of staff supporting children's language development, problem-solving skills and social competence through play. In the 2-3 room, staff consistently worked at children's level and used calm, respectful communication. For example, staff gently invited children to join experiences by asking, "Would you like to come over?" and "Can I sit beside you?" This approach respected children's choices, promoted positive relationships and helped children feel valued, listened to and included. Children told us they felt safe, enjoyed spending time with their friends and valued the support staff provided when they were upset. One child said, "Sometimes staff play with me when I'm feeling sad." These positive and trusting relationships supported children's emotional wellbeing, confidence and sense of security.

Whilst staff were generally responsive to children's needs, some children were not consistently supported to remain engaged in play or fully benefit from learning opportunities. A small number of children would have benefited from more targeted support to ensure activities reflected their individual needs, interests and areas for development. As a result, some children were not always supported to make the best possible progress in their learning and development.

The service had recently introduced new approaches to recording and monitoring children's learning and development. Additional support from leaders had helped staff begin to develop these systems and there were early signs of improvement. However, the approaches were not yet fully established across the nursery. Staff did not consistently evaluate children's progress or clearly identify and review what children needed to learn next. Families were not yet fully involved in planning and reviewing their children's learning. As a result, the service could not yet demonstrate that all children consistently experienced sufficient challenge, progression and opportunities to build on their existing skills. Continued development and monitoring of these systems should help ensure children's learning experiences are better planned, reviewed and tailored to their individual needs, leading to improved outcomes for children.

Whilst we identified examples of positive practice and children were engaged in a range of enjoyable learning experiences, these strengths were not yet consistently evident across the nursery. Approaches to planning, observation and assessment were still being embedded and did not consistently demonstrate how children's progress was being evaluated and used to inform their next steps in learning. Despite these positive examples, the quality of learning experiences and assessment of children's progress was not yet sufficiently consistent across the nursery to ensure all children experienced appropriate challenge and progression. As a result, leaders could not yet demonstrate that all children were making the best possible progress in their learning and development. Continued development, implementation and monitoring of these systems should help ensure children's learning experiences are better planned, reviewed and tailored to their individual needs, leading to improved outcomes for children.

Children are supported to achieve 4 - Good

We evaluated this quality indicator as good, where there were important strengths in the service's work and some areas which would benefit from further improvement.

Children experienced kindness, care and respect throughout the nursery. We observed warm interactions, shared laughter and positive relationships across the service. Staff knew children well and demonstrated a caring approach which helped children feel safe, secure and valued. Parents consistently spoke positively about the nurturing relationships their children had developed with staff. One parent told us, "The staff really care about my daughter and have taken the time to get to know her as an individual." As a result, children experienced a strong sense of belonging and emotional security, which supported their confidence and wellbeing.

Staff had developed thoughtful approaches to supporting children's emotional wellbeing and social development. For example, friendship walks had been introduced in response to children's social needs. Staff identified children who would benefit from opportunities to develop new friendships and created small group experiences to encourage interaction, inclusion and relationship building. This helped children develop confidence, communication skills and positive relationships with their peers. Although this approach was still in the early stages of development, staff shared positive examples of how it was already helping some children become more confident and socially engaged.

Care routines were becoming increasingly personalised to meet children's individual needs. Staff explained that changes to key worker arrangements, particularly during personal care routines, had improved children's experiences by providing greater consistency and strengthening relationships. Children benefited from support provided by familiar adults who understood their individual needs, preferences and routines. During our observations, staff responded sensitively to children's emotions and provided reassurance, comfort and encouragement when required. As a result, children experienced care that supported their wellbeing and helped them feel secure.

Transitions throughout the day were generally calm, well organised and supportive of children's wellbeing. Improvements to lunch and snack arrangements had created a more positive and relaxed experience for children. Moving children's coats into the playroom made them easier to access and encouraged greater independence when preparing for outdoor play. Children also enjoyed opportunities to spend time in the 'Plaza' area during the day. We discussed with the management team the need to further strengthen door security arrangements during arrival and collection times to support children's safety. Continued reflection on daily routines and transitions would help ensure all children consistently experienced smooth and positive transitions throughout the nursery.

Children's personal plans were in place and showed some involvement from children and families. Staff had a good understanding of the children in their care and used this knowledge to support their wellbeing and development. However, recording systems did not always fully reflect the detailed knowledge staff held about individual children. Some plans lacked important information, review dates or clearly recorded strategies to support children's needs. As a result, the service was not always able to clearly demonstrate the impact of support provided for individual children. Leaders had already identified this as an area for improvement and were well placed to strengthen these processes.

Partnerships with families were positive, respectful and supportive. Families told us they felt welcomed, listened to and valued by staff. Parents described communication as approachable and helpful and particularly valued the visibility of staff and managers at drop-off and collection times. Opportunities for families to participate in events and activities helped create a strong sense of community within the nursery. As a result, families felt involved in their children's experiences and were able to contribute to nursery life. The service should continue to develop communication methods to ensure information is shared in ways that meet the needs of all families and further strengthen partnership working.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.scot.

Detailed evaluations

Leadership	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Leadership and management of staff and resources	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Children play and learn	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate
Playing, learning and developing	3 - Satisfactory / Adequate

Children are supported to achieve	4 - Good
Nurturing care and support	4 - Good

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